

# Literary criticism – a farewell to arms

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There comes a day for all when a transition occurs from child to an adult. In the fictional work, *A Farewell to Arms*, Ernest Hemingway depicts the main character, Fredrick Henry, as an immature soldier in World War I. As the story unfolds, Fredrick Henry begins to ponder the question “ Who am I”. With the help and love of Catherine Barkley and in response to the harsh war, Henry “ comes of age”. In *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway validates the theme of the internal struggle associated with coming of age through the portrayal of the startling setting of World War I to show how the reality of war matures young men, Catherine to demonstrate how losing love results in personal maturation, and the symbolic rain to promote his search for a mature self.

Ernest Hemingway was a best-selling and critical acclaimed author. His first book, *Three Stories and Ten Poems*, was published in 1923. It featured collection of short stories. The most popular short story follows a puzzled boy trying to identify the source of his father’s shame, which the father fails to disclose. Throughout his life, Ernest Hemingway wrote over 100 collections of short stories, poems, and novels.

Hemingway often times used many reoccurring themes in his novels. The typical themes that commonly appeared in his stories were those of nature settings, the inevitability of death, fatalistic heroism, disillusionment, masculinity, ambivalence, and symbolic use of animals. Ernest Hemingway received the Silver Medal of Military Valor in the Italian Armed Forces for his service in World War I and the Bronze Star from the United States Armed Forces for his services in World War II. Following the wars, he received the Pulitzer Prize for his 1953 novel, *The Old Man and the Sea*. For his

collections, he received the American Academy of Arts and Letters Award of Merit in 1954. Later on in 1954, he received the Nobel Prize for Literature.

His last award came in 1999, Top Reporter for the Last Hundred Years (Perkins). Ernest Hemingway often wrote about his own life experiences.

Many of his collections and novels came from his events during his enlistment in World War I. “ Hemingway’s stories are not simply representative of the era and its emotional atmosphere; they are autobiographical, revealing Hemingway’s own feelings, experiences, and failures” (Palladino). His works also included his views on certain events that occurred during his lifetime. Ernest Hemingway lived during two of the most popular wars.

Many of his writings were written during his service of World War I. He hated the reasons of war and presented his political views throughout his collections of novels and short stories. The famous festival of San Fermin in Pamplona, Spain influenced the writing of “ The Sun Also Rises”. His experiences in Cuba during the 1950s also contributed to many stories being published. Hemingway became depressed and later committed suicide, but this emotional distress led to many of his dark themes and stories.

Political and social issues were the highlight of Ernest Hemingway’s novels. The startling setting of World War I reveals how the reality of war matures young men. The setting would force young men to become masculine in order to survive during the war. Fredrick Henry was a young man during the war and he became a man through his near death experiences and serious injuries as a medic of the Italian Army.” They were beaten to start with. They

were beaten when they took them from their farms and put them in the army.

That is why the peasant has wisdom, because he is defeated from the start. Put him power and see how wise he is” (Hemingway 179). Henry was based on Ernest Hemingway and he comes of age through being beaten and put down. You learn what it feels like to be at the lowest part of life and builds you as a man. Although Henry faced adversity, he kept hope that he would recover from his injury and that Italy will become victorious.” Wars and other conflicts betrayed even the most modest measure of hope of the title particularly national and the universal” (Nakjavani).

Many soldiers, including Fredrick Henry, had strong faith that they would win the war. To have hope helps become a man to cope with adversity. Also the harsh conditions the soldiers were under greatly contributed to the increase in their masculinity because they went through difficulty and learned to become stronger, better men. “ It would be possible, though, to read these sentiments as figuring the condition of World War I masculinity, focused as it was on a particularly passive form of warfare” (Herndl 245). Many young men were forced into the war.

The war then gave them no choice, but to mature as a person. Henry was in the war at a young age forcing him to mature in that environment. Although Hemingway depicted Fredrick Henry as a very immature man in the beginning of the novel, through his experiences of war, it is clear that he quickly matured. Catherine is used to demonstrate how losing love results in

personal maturation. Love has often been perceived as the factor that separates men from children.

Fredrick Henry in the beginning of the novel tries to just use Catherine Barkley for his sexual intentions, which is often the sign of immaturity in males. “ She was looking at me in the dark. I was angry and yet certain, seeing it all ahead like the moves in a chess game” (Hemingway 26). Henry doesn't expect love in the beginning and as an immature male, expects sexual interaction. Through love and affection he becomes a man.

He knew he had to grow as a person to understand the depth of Catherine. As the novel goes on, Fredrick Henry transforms from an immature unattached man to a caring, responsible, loving man for Catherine, resulting in the conception of a child.” He changes from a self-indulgent, unattached young man to someone who accepts the love of Catherine Barkley and assumes the responsibility for their shared life together, including the impending birth of their child” (Lewis 35). The love for Catherine also matures Fredrick. As they begin to share a life together, then he becomes a mature man for her. The maturation is shown he displays his love for Catherine by reciting the context of a poem and literature after making love.

“ After making love with Catherine, Henry recalls a poem “ To His Coy Mistress” to display the subversion of hetero-masculinity” (Takeuchi). Sexual interactions are a mature action to do. Henry displays a mature action by making love with Catherine and recalling a poem he once read to describe his feelings for her. The quote also says how he displays masculinity by recalling that poem after making love. The attachment, love, and death of

Catherine at the end of the novel finally builds Henry's identity, which was questioned throughout the novel. The symbolic rain promotes his search for a mature self.

The rain becomes the symbol of Fredrick Henry's immature side, and appears during dark events in the novel. When the symbolic rain followed the passing of a loved one, and the grief for Fredrick Henry will contribute to his maturation." I could see nothing but the dark and the rain falling across the light out of the window. So that was it. The baby was dead" (Hemingway 327).

The true challenge in life is going through adversity and losing loved ones. The rain served as a symbol of darkness and an event of growth. The loss of Henry's child helped him grow as a man. Greif serves as a lesson for one to go through to learn how you should act and how you take on life. Further in the novel, Hemingway suggests that the search for maturation and the search for an identity are hopeless when the rain occurs.

" Often the rain suggests impending doom; there is a storm the night that Frederic learns he must leave Italy at once to avoid being arrested, Catherine dreams that she is dead in the rain, and indeed at the conclusion of the novel, it is raining when Frederic returns to his hotel" (Markley). The rain symbolizes throughout the book a dark event, which will put Henry into a darker place. This darker place will help Henry grow as a man. It symbolizes here the loss of identity and immaturity. When there is rain, you know Henry will come out as a stronger person. As Catherine's dream is

about her death and rain is present, this will bring in Henry's search for identity with the loss of her.

Also Ernest Hemingway teaches the quest of finding an identity will not be accomplished without assuming responsibility. "That midnight, as a rainstorm sweeps across Lake Maggiore, Emilio comes to announce that the military police will arrest Frederic in the morning and the lieutenant once again plays the game of 'tell me what to do'" (Donaldson). Hemingway teaches the quest of selfhood through responsibility and mistakes. The rainstorm symbolizes and foreshadows something dark coming in the near future. The dark event will mature Henry by teaching him responsibility. The quote agrees with the statement by saying how something wrong will come to Henry from his immaturity and now will become responsible.

The rain will symbolize Fredrick Henry's search for identity and maturation as a result of his mistakes and losses. Fredrick Henry fought through daunting obstacles, overcame injuries, found love, and lost loved ones resulting from the war. He "comes of age" throughout the novel as a result of the war and love. He transforms from an unattached and careless man to a responsible, loving man who marries Catherine Barkley by the end of the novel. The war battles and injury forced him into manhood.

Fredrick Henry shows how maturation is possible no matter where you may be. It can occur at any time and is necessary for one to truly find themselves. Readers learn from the main character, Fredrick Henry, the transition in life from a child to a man is not always a smooth process, but is one worth going about to achieve happiness and a sense of self-worth.